THE SECOND DAY.

14th February 1911.

The Assembly met at 11 A. M. on Tuesday, the 14th February 1911.

The Memoranda of subjects sent up by the Members had been grouped under the heads of General and Local subjects, and the former were first taken up.

GENERAL SUBJECTS.

I. FINANCE.

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1. ***The desirability of equitably distributing the annual allotments for Public Works &c. in the State Budget, among the several taluks, and granting local self-government to the people by the formation of Village and Taluk Boards.***

Mr. Kanakku Govindan Atchuthan (Member, Parur Taluk) first thanked the Government for the generous action taken by them on his representation at the last Assembly about the treatment of the Munambom *Kuthagapattom* lands. Proceeding to the subject, he observed that the distribution of the annual allotments for expenditure in the various taluks of the State, as now done by the Government, could not be justified, if the expenditure was intended to be regulated on considerations either of the real requirements of a taluk or the total revenue derived from it. The subject had been brought to the notice of the Government at successive sessions of the Assembly, and, though the Government had been increasing the allotments in the Budget from year to year, the Member regretted that no benefit had yet accrued to the Parur taluk as a result of such increase. The Administration Report showed that over 21 lacs of rupees was spent during 1085 on buildings, roads, bridges, canals, &c., but no appreciable amount was spent in the Parur taluk. The people of the taluk did not ask the Government to spend anything like the amounts spent on the Kodayar Project or the Quilon-Shencotta Railway. All that they prayed for were a few absolutely necessary cartable roads and a few canals useful for agriculture and traffic, and these could be provided without the expenditure of any very large amount. The Member stated that these roads and canals were necessary for the very existence of the people in the taluk, as the frequent floods in the Periyar caused them much suffering every year. He said

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that the following were the chief causes of the present backward condition of the taluk:—

(1) the distant and isolated situation of the taluk;

(2) the insufficiency of the amount allotted by the Government for expenditure in the taluk;

(3) the absence of a suitable local agency to see that whatever amount was sanctioned was spent in the most useful and absolutely needed directions.

The taluk, owing to its distant and isolated position, jutting into the Cochin territory, was visited by very few officers of the State in their tours, and hence the wants of the taluk were not brought prominently to the notice of the Government. The Director of Agriculture had not included Parur in his programme of tours, though the taluk was one of the best fitted for agricultural experiments. The taluk stood in urgent need of much agricultural help, as most of the people lived by agriculture alone. The Sanitary Commissioner also seemed to have neglected the taluk, and Government were doing very little in the matter of safeguarding the health of the people. Smallpox had been raging in a virulent form in the taluk, and neither the Sanitary Commissioner nor any other responsible officer of the Department did anything towards the prevention of the dire disease. The Member then referred with regret to what he had heard about the contemplated reduction of the only hospital of the taluk, *viz.* that at Parur, into a dispensary. If the area of the taluk, the absence of any other hospital in it, the distance to the nearest hospitals in the adjoining taluks, the want of proper means of communication, the importance of the Parur town in many respects, and the number of people seeking medical relief in the present hospital, were all given due consideration, the Member was sure that the conversion of the hospital into dispensary would not be ordered.

As the relative importance of the various taluks was not being adequately considered in distributing the allotments sanctioned for expenditure under "Irrigation Works" and "Communications," certain taluks at present received practically no money for these purposes. So far as the Parur taluk was concerned, the most urgent requirements were village roads. Besides opening new roads, the existing roads also had to be kept in a state of proper repair. The Administration Report showed that only about Rs. 13,000 was spent on village roads in the whole State during 1085, while a sum of Rs. 31,500 was spent on a few Planters' roads in the same year. The unexpended balance

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at the disposal of the P. W. D. every year, after meeting the legitimate requirements of that Department, would, the Member said, be sufficient, if properly expended in a manner to meet the requirements of the several taluks. But he contended that it was very necessary that this amount should not be spent through the P. W. D. The expenditure of the P. W. D. was unnecessarily large, and that Department had not the facilities to gauge the conditions and needs of particular localities. The roads etc. at present in charge of the P. W. D. could be maintained in a better condition, with half the amount allotted to the Department. The Member therefore requested (1) that the allotment for Irrigation Works and Communications should be increased; (2) that a separate Fund should be sanctioned for each taluk to meet its local wants; and (3) that the control over each such Fund should be given to a Board consisting of the local executive officer and a few of the leading ryots.

Mr. P. Kesava Pillai, B. A. & B. L. (Member, Quilon Taluk) requested that the annual allotment for Public Works be divided into what may be called a General Fund and a Local Fund, if possible between the taluks, or at least among the Divisions. Though, for practical purposes, something similar was done every year, the amounts under the General and the Local Fund were not being shown separately in the Administration Report or the Budget Estimate, and no fixed proportion was observed between the two. The Member defined the General Fund to mean such moneys as were used for works benefiting the whole State, while the Local Fund represented the amounts spent on works useful only for a particular locality. The latter items were small. There was no equitable distribution of funds among the several taluks. For instance, the taluks of Quilon, Karunagapalli, Kartigapalli, Ambalapuzha, Shertallai, and part of Vycome, which brought in a large revenue to the State, had not received any attention as yet at the hands of the P. W. D. Almost every year, the Members from these taluks had made representations that they wanted this road, that bridge, or some such public work. The people of the Northern Division generally felt that the taluks of that Division did *not* receive that amount of consideration which, on account of their importance, they deserved at the hands of the Government. If, therefore, the annual allotment be divided into a General and a Local Fund and the Local Fund equitably distributed among the several taluks and spent in consultation with the local executive officers, the Member said that the grievances of the people would disappear. He therefore prayed for action being taken on the lines suggested by him.

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Another point suggested by the Member was that something like a Village Board or Council should be created in each *pakuthi*, with control over local sanitation, vernacular education and also in the matter of village pathways, watercourses, tanks, grazing grounds and other places of public use. The Council might consist of about a dozen gentlemen for each *pakuthi*, including officials and non-officials. The Tahsildar might be made the *ex-officio* President, and the Excise Inspector, the Sub-Registrar and some of the other local officers might be appointed as members. The non-officials should be chosen from the villages and they should form the majority. The Member said that such organisations should properly begin from the bottom – the village, and that, unlike the Taluk or District Boards elsewhere, the Village Boards, if started, were bound to work well.

It was not true that the villages did not require much sanitation. People migrated from one village to another and sometimes carried with them contagious diseases such as leprosy and syphilis. There was the danger of such men polluting the public tanks and thereby spreading the disease. The Sanitary Department was helpless in the matter, owing to the inadequacy of the staff. Unless the villagers were given some control in the matter, so that they might co-operate with the sanitary authorities, there was no hope of the villages bettering their condition. Speaking of the vaccination work in the villages, the Member referred to the Dewan's observation, in his Address, that a great deal could be done if non-official gentlemen like the Members of the Assembly would interest themselves in removing the unfortunate prejudice against vaccination which prevailed in most places in the State, especially in Middle and North Travancore; the Member added that, though there was some prejudice on the part of the people in certain quarters, part of the blame at any rate rested with the officers of the Department, who were not as diligent as could be wished. Things could be much better managed if only the villagers were entrusted with the vaccination work and given some control over the Vaccinators.

A similar control might be given to the Village Boards in the matter of vernacular education. There was no necessity for investing them with complete control over the schools. The Inspectors might continue to exercise their powers. The Boards might look to such matters as the maintenance of discipline among the teachers, by reporting defects to the Director. There was no difficulty in getting the proper men for these Boards.

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Coming to pathways, tanks etc., the Member said that most of the tanks in North Travancore, which supplied drinking water to cattle and were used by men for bathing purposes, were in a condition of utter neglect, many of them being silted up and encroached upon by the adjacent land-owners. Channels and watercourses were also similarly neglected and encroached upon, and there were no grazing gounds for cattle. The villagers were helpless in the matter. If they were made responsible and given some powers, these pathways, tanks and watercourses would be kept in a much better condition and all encroachments duly prevented.

The Village Boards might further be asked to witness transfers of possession under decrees of Courts—a fertile source of complaint at present, and also house searches and the preparation of mahazars by the Police. The late Dewan Mr. Ramaiengar had promised to ive these Boards the power of disposal of petty civil suits also. But, in the opinion of the Member, this power could only be granted after the Boards had gained some experience in other matters.

Having regard to the advantages attaching to the Village Board organisation, the Member requested that a beginning might be made by forming the Boards tentatively in a few selected villages.

Mr. Vasudevan Subramonian Muthathu (Member, Thiruvalla Taluk) said that, besides the public roads, canals and bridges, the maintenance of and repairs to which were being attended to by the P. W. Department, there were a great many pathways and lanes which were largely made use of by the public. Owing to the multifarious calls upon the attention of the Revenue Department, whose duty it was to look to the proper maintenance of these pathways, the latter were left to take care of themselves and they were consequently entirely neglected. These narrow and dirty paths were overgrown with shrubs and thickets and they afforded shelter for poisonous snakes. The danger and insecurity to human lives was hence very great. The Member recalled the instance of a Tahsildar having been recently bitten by a snake but was fortunately saved from the effects of the poison by proper medical aid reaching in time. He said that accidents from snake-bites could be greatly minimised if only these pathways and lanes were kept in good condition. These narrow lanes were also being made narrower every day, owing to the encroachments which the adjoining land-owners were allowed

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to carry on with impunity, as a result of the scant attention which the Revenue authorities paid to such matters.

The Member then referred to the damage done to paddy cultivation in hill tracts on account of floods in the rainy season. These could be prevented by suitable embankments and reservoirs, constructed and maintained at the proper places. Some of the existing embankments and reservoirs had gone into disrepair and the sites had been recorded as *poramboke* lands by the Settlement authorities. The people were perfectly willing to carry out the works, but the provisions of the Land Conservancy Regulation prevented them from actually engaging themselves in the work. The Member drew attention to the hard lot of the Tahsildar, who had to serve too many masters at a time, and he said that the creation of a Local Board would considerably lighten the burden of the Revenue Department. He then mentioned the facilities which the creation of such a Board would afford to the Agricultural Department in making their efforts reach the poor and ignorant people, and he pointed out that that was another reason in favour of the establishment of Local Boards. The Member incidentally remarked that the poorer classes of men were unable to buy the Government Gazette in full and were therefore not in a position to be benefited by the Agricultural Bulletins issued as parts of the Gazette. It would be a great advantage to the public, if parts of the Gazette were sold at a low price. The Member also pointed out that the moneys allotted for minor agricultural works and village pathways were not distributed among the several taluks in proportion to the extent of the area under cultivation in each taluk or to the amount of tax imposed thereon. In view of all the above reasons, the Member said that it was very desirable and necessary to constitute a Taluk Board in each taluk, with power to collect and spend money for administering local affairs of a particular nature and to entrust it with a fund for meeting wants of a general character, under the direct supervision, control and guidance of the Dewan Peishkar. He said that the system of District and Taluk Board administration in British India might be introduced in Travancore, with the necessary alterations to suit local conditions and requirements.

Mr. Kanakku Krishnan Atchuthan (Member, Alengad Taluk) requested that some ruling should be passed whereby each taluk might invariably get an equitable sum out of the total annual allotment and the sum so obtained might be spent only after due consultation with those who were to be benefited thereby. For this end, he pro-

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posed the formation of Taluk Boards, with elected Members from each *pakuthi*, and the Tahsildar as an Official Member.

The Dewan then called upon a few other Members to state their opinions as to the practicability of the scheme above suggested.

Mr. M. O. Mathevan Pillai, B. A. (Member, Kalkulam Taluk) said that it was one of the subjects he had proposed to bring forward and that the scheme was quite practicable. He said that a sufficient number of men could be found in each village, capable of forming the Village Board. He agreed with Mr. Kesava Pillai in thinking that these Boards might be invested with some control over vernacular education, and also small public works affecting the villages. He was also for giving to these Boards the power of adjudication in small cause suits up to a certain valuation. He said that the Board should not consist of more than five Members, and that they should all be nominated by the Government for the present. He had no objection to the imposition of a nominal village cess, if necessary, which might be supplemented by a Government grant.

Mr. A. Harihara Iyer (Member, Chirayinkil Taluk) also agreed to the proposal and said that the scheme would work well in most of the villages. He was for giving the Boards the power of disposing of petty small cause suits, in the case of those villages where competent persons were available to form the Boards.

Mr. K. Narayana Pillai (Member, Ambalapuzha Taluk) said that extra taxation for the purpose of these Boards was not feasible. In his opinion, competent persons to work the Boards could be found, and the Boards might be entrusted with the maintenance of the village roads, the disposal of petty small cause suits, and the like. He said that the Members should be chosen by election for a period of 2 or 3 years, and that the strength of the Board should not be more than five.

Mr. N. Kumaran Ashan (Member, Nominated) said that he had not thought about the question.

Dewan's reply.—I have heard with interest what the Members have said on the important subject of local self-government. His Highness' Government recognise that some action may have to be taken, later on, in the direction of providing local government in rural areas. The matter will be considered.

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